

New approach to war on gangs

Police get everyone involved and the effort is paying off

by Jeff Cardinale

It is one of the biggest crime problems gripping virtually every city in America – gang violence. Many cities have tried but lost the “gang war” as their police agencies conducted random or short-lived suppression efforts.

The Central California City of Fresno was no different. For decades, this city of just under 500,000 used traditional aggressive suppression and enforcement tactics against gangs, usually in response to surges in gang violence.

Yet, the Bulldog Street gang continued to evolve into a bold and unpredictable gang with violence escalating to the point of putting many police officers in peril as they worked to perform their daily duties.

The fear associated with the gang members’ crimes had

risen to the level where the residents of Fresno were starting to feel intimidated; their quality of life threatened.

It was at that point that Fresno Mayor Alan Autry realized it was going to take more than just the police to solve the problem. “You can’t arrest your way out of a gang problem,” Autry said. “If we are going to be successful in the war against the terrorism of gang violence, our efforts must be aimed at prevention, intervention and rehabilitation in addition to suppression.”

In the Summer of 2006, the Mayor launched a bold and innovative plan to address not only the gang violence, but the gang members themselves, who were desperate to get themselves out of the dead-end lifestyle they led.

The project, called the Mayor’s Gang Prevention Initiative (MGPI), works in partnership with the Fresno Police Department and nearly 100 local service providing agencies focusing on gang prevention, intervention and rehabilitation.

In MGPI’s unique model,



Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer (right), Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger (center) and Fresno Mayor Alan Autry (left) discuss strategies in the war on gangs.

officers and community recruiters work hand in hand with a community coordinator to identify those gang members who want to leave the gang lifestyle behind, then helps them gain the necessary skills and services to become employed and productive citizens.

MGPI currently has 92 service providers who assist clients (gang members) with issues such as counseling, anger management, job training and placement, obtaining a GED, parenting classes, mental health services, tutoring and tattoo removal.

Shortly after the launch of

MGPI, Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer announced Operation Bulldog, a multi-faceted gang enforcement operation with the ultimate goal of eliminating the 4,000 validated “Bulldog” Street gang members and the 6,000 gang associates in the City of Fresno. The direction from Chief Dyer was clear: any case that involved a Bulldog Gang member became an immediate priority and every officer in the agency was tasked with legally stopping gang members at every opportunity.

Operation Bulldog has netted more than 2,000 felony arrests and the lowest crime

levels in more than 40 years and MGPI has received more than 500 referrals to the program and more than 100 gang members are already receiving life-changing services.

Fresno Mayor Alan Autry and Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer agree that suppression alone wasn’t the answer. “Everyone in our community deserves to live free from the fear of gangs,” said Chief Dyer.

For more information about the MGPI or Operation Bulldog, please contact me (Jeff Cardinale) at (559) 621-2486.

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